

## **Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 4, Primeval History, Genesis 1-11**

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This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudon in his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 4, Primeval History, Genesis 1 to 11.

Most of this course will focus on the later periods of biblical history, but I do want to touch on primeval history.

This is a history of Genesis, the first 11 chapters, and just give a few isolated archaeological finds that do shed light on this very early history of the Bible, of the biblical record. I want us to look at this very early Sumerian cylinder seal. Now, a cylinder seal is a seal. Again, that is not, you don't impress it like you do a regular seal, maybe that hangs from your neck or is on a ring on your finger, but this looks basically like a cigarette butt, a small little teeny rolling pin, and you roll it across clay, and it has a depiction or a scene, and I want us to look at this early Sumerian cylinder seal.

Again, look at the date here, roughly about 2200 BC, just before the time of Adam, and if you notice, you've got two seated figures here, seated facing a tree, and this tree may be an object of veneration or worship. One apparently seems to be a male, one a female, though we can't be certain about that, but look at what's behind each figure. You see a serpent, and that serpent is not lying down; it is standing up.

And again, the tree is an object, apparently, of veneration or worship. We can't get too more detailed than that, but this seems to indicate some recollection of the scene in Genesis chapter three, the fall of humanity, where the serpent tempts the women, and the man follows, and they eat of the fruit of this tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and sin enters the world through that act, probably the darkest day on earth. So very interesting seal that, again, seems to preserve some recollection of the fall.

Now to an archaeological site in Israel. This is a very early temple at a place called En Gedi. It overlooks the Dead Sea.

It's a beautiful site. You can see the bottom right picture, you've got a beautiful view of the Dead Sea and Transjordan. And En Gedi, again, was a site that is mentioned several times in scripture.

This is a region where David and his men hid from Saul. It was in the Judean wilderness. We'll look at the Judean wilderness in more detail later.

But this temple was, I believe, discovered in the 1950s by Yohanan Aharoni, and then excavated during Benjamin Mazar's work at the Tel, or the site of En Gedi, the later town. This was found to be an isolated structure, very early, fourth, or even as early as the early fifth millennium BC. The chalcolithic period is what we call the Copper Stone Age.

Again, remember, this site is isolated. There's nothing around it that can be dated, no houses or anything that we've found that dates to this early of a period. What we have here is a broad-room house or temple. You can see the areas here, either stone wine basins or cisterns and benches.

And so, this apparently was a temple. We have a gatehouse here, a supply room here, and another gate here. But in the courtyard, we have this that looks like a donut, but it's apparently some sort of a basin.

And here's a picture of that, what that looks like here and here. What was that basin for? Again, maybe perhaps for libations, for to hold water, there wasn't any lining or anything that would determine that. But I believe, and I think others do believe, that this was actually originally a tree that was worshipped at this isolated site.

And the basin or the rock work that was built around it was part of that installation for this tree of worship. And later on in Scripture, we have lots of evidence of worship of trees or poles, asherah poles. And under every green tree, again, the statement made in the Bible, people worshipped and practiced pagan Canaanite religions.

And I think here we have very early evidence of that. And again, this cannot, I can't prove this, but I think that was for a tree. And it was a sacred tree.

Again, we look back at that tree in Genesis chapter three, the knowledge of good and evil, and this is possibly an archaeological depiction of it being worshipped in an isolated place. The Chalcolithic period in the Holy Land is very interesting to study. Again, there are no inscriptions and no writing this early.

We simply don't know who these people were, but they disappeared from the archaeological record. They have distinctive pottery and distinctive architecture, and nobody knows what happened to them. And that's, again, another question historically.

But this you can see is in a very good state of preservation. The superstructure of those walls would have been mud brick. The stone foundational walls or the first few courses still remain.

Amazing. Just to give everybody an idea, this was at least 2,000, perhaps 2,500 years old when David was running around this area. That's how old this is.

And it remains a great place to visit today. You got to do some climbing. You can see on the upper right hand, you can see the way up to the Ascent of Ziz going up into the hill country, Nahal Arugot that goes up into the hill country of Judah.

This is one of the approaches to Judah, one of the ways to get up from the rift or the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea region. And so, it's an important strategic site. There were later Israelite forts in this area and Roman forts as well.

But this was preserved beautifully and excavated and published by the Israelis. Let's talk about Eden, the Garden of Eden, and Gan Eden. Can we locate it? This is one of, again, an archaeological question that I'm asked once in a while.

And we have, basically, to locate the Garden of Eden, you can take a dart and throw it at a map of the earth. And somebody's probably recommended wherever that dart ends up. If it's on land, somebody's probably recommended that's where the Garden of Eden was. There are some hints in the location of the Garden of Eden, and that is the four rivers that are mentioned in Genesis 2 that flow out of Eden.

And those, of course, are the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates. Now, the Tigris and Euphrates are known. Doesn't necessarily mean they had the same course at that time, that early in history.

But the Pishon and Gihon are not decisively known. Now, some have suggested the Nile was one or other river. We don't know for certain.

But years ago, I heard a wonderful paper at an archaeological conference that described northern Iraq and western Iran as having a lot of place names that seem to preserve the name Eden. So that's right at the northern end, kind of a mountainous hilly region of Iraq and Iran. So, could that, those place names, toponyms, preserve the actual Garden of Eden? Perhaps.

You can see some of the meanings of Eden. Acadian luxury, abundance, or plain, lushness in Acadian and Sumerian. So hopefully, again, when the political situation changes, maybe we can do some more work out there.

There's also an article written by an archaeologist by the name of James Sauer. He worked in Jordan for many years. And it was written in 1994.

And he pointed out a series of satellite photos that were taken during the first Gulf War in the Saudi desert. And these photos preserved a huge riverbed, dry riverbed that stretched from the Hejaz Mountains on the western coast of Saudi Arabia to the

Persian Gulf and united with the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in the Shahr al-Arab. And he suggests, and again, Sauer was not a, I would call an evangelical.

He suggested that this could be one of the rivers of Eden. It was called by scientists the Kuwaiti River. Here are some of the locations suggested for Eden.

And this is the dry riverbed that in antiquity, thousands of years ago, was a huge river. He believes that's the Pishon River mentioned in chapter two of Genesis. And there's another picture here of that river.

And again, starting in the Hejaz Mountains, going across northern Saudi Arabia, and emptying out close to the mouth of the Tigris-Euphrates, which unite in the Shahr al-Arab before they hit the Persian Gulf. In antiquity, that was probably different. But very interesting.

And that would have been known, again, very early in history. And so, we may have some evidence there. Now, where's the Gihon? We think of the Gihon Spring outside of ancient Jerusalem.

Again, it's a spring that's still active. But that's not a river. It probably just simply is a different use of the word, which means gusher.

So, that still remains uncertain. Noah and the Ark account. Again, we'll talk about Ark legends in different cultures.

But the neat theological thing about the Ark is it has one entrance. It doesn't have multiple entrances, but one entrance. And that entrance, again, meant life and salvation for the animals and the people that entered the Ark.

As Christians, we look at that as an early image of Christ being the door of salvation for us. Many of you know the Babylonian tablet called the Gilgamesh Epic. It talks about a man named Utnapishtim and his boat, a certain Noah-type character.

There are similarities between the Noah story in the Bible and the Noah narrative, and differences as well as major differences. But in my mind, and I think in the minds of many others, they clearly are based on a single tradition with variants; again, we think of the Gilgamesh Epic as perhaps embellished and changed over the centuries. But they clearly have a common source.

And that was a major find, again, translated by George Smith, which we talked about in an earlier lecture. The other thing I want to point out is most, and I got this from answers in Genesis: most ancient societies and ancient cultures have some sort of flood tradition. And that certainly can't be by chance.

The other, one of the other points I want to make is the site of Mount Ararat. There's actually multiple mountains, Little Ararat and Ararat itself. And we have at Andrews University an expedition in eastern Turkey right now that is doing a survey around Mount Ararat.

Hopefully, we'll get a permit to climb the mountain and take samples of the wood found on top of it. One of the few things or one of the things few people know is that the mountain itself, quite a ways down, is totally devoid of any kind of wood. And there have been lots of people that have climbed Ararat that found worked wood, hewn wood scattered over various parts of the mountain, which had to be brought up by hand or deposited there.

It was not there was; there's simply no trees. But our Andrews team is doing an archaeological survey around Ararat, which is biblical Urartu. And they're finding pottery and a kind of a progression of pottery, and they want to chase that pottery down south to the south and see how the pottery changes and hopefully get some sort of an idea if there was a migration very early in the history of peoples or peoples.

They're also looking at a migration of people from the region of Urartu to the south, which might, again, collaborate with the biblical account. Again, another artist's depiction of the mount or the arc at Mount Ararat. But a lot of pseudo fake archaeology has been focused on finding the ark, and a lot of claims made.

And so, most of them are all spurious, clearly spurious. And so, the Andrews group that is doing this is being very careful and going through the proper scientific methodology to in their work. Okay, we come to the symbolism of the rainbow.

And again, the rainbow was God's sign that he would never again allow a flood to envelop the earth. And this is like a treaty or a covenant that he made between us here on the earth and himself. Now, in Mesopotamia, in Mesopotamian iconography, when a covenant is made between a lesser and greater party, as in this again, another cylinder seal impression here, I believe, and you've got the greater party making a covenant with a lesser party and look at you have a bow.

And the curve of that bow is always pointed to the greater party. The string of the bow is pointed to the lesser party. So, this is a beautiful example of God's covenant; the greater party again is the curved part of the rainbow, points towards heaven, and the flat or the actual string of the bow is the earth, us.

And so, this very early custom in Mesopotamia, I believe, makes use of that covenant between God and Noah and Noah's descendants. When did the flood occur? It's really impossible to say. We do know that the Neolithic period, and again, before

4300, you have walled cities farming pottery, some sort of structure, polity, perhaps chiefdoms, again, anthropological language here.

So, you've got the society in place in the Neolithic period to describe the situation before the flood, the Antediluvian period. When did the flood occur? In the Neolithic period, you have the Neolithic period, and the Neolithic period is also interesting because that is, again, replaced by a totally different material culture, different people, the pottery is different, and everything is different. And what happened to them? They just disappear.

Could that have something to do with a global flood? And these are questions, again, that biblical scholars have been asking for some time. and we just really don't have any answers. Again, famously, Wolley's excavations at Ur uncovered a thick layer of silt.

He thought he had found evidence for the flood, but that was apparently proven false at the time. Now, south of Ein Gedi, is a deep canyon going from the Dead Sea up into the hill country called the Nahal Mishmar. In the 1960s, the Israelis undertook a very vigorous archaeological survey of these wadis, looking for more Dead Sea Scrolls.

And because they were finding that the Bedouin were looking for Dead Sea Scrolls, they wanted to somehow beat the Bedouin and, if there were more scrolls, find them themselves. So, they sent out various teams of these canyons, different wadis, and one of them was led by a guy by the name of Pesach Bar-Adon. Pesach Bar-Adon excavated in a cave along the cliff face of one of these wadis and thought when he uncovered this, he had found the temple treasure from Solomon.

He was so excited. But when they got back to Jerusalem and they studied it, they clearly thought they clearly recognized it was much older than Solomon. This was a cache of copper artifacts, a treasure, truly a treasure, dating to the Chalcolithic period.

Again, the same time as that temple found at En-Gedi. Whether those two are related, we don't know. But the temple at En-Gedi and the finds in this cave were clearly put there with the idea that the people would come back and retrieve them.

They never did. The temple at En-Gedi was abandoned. It wasn't destroyed.

There was very little pottery on the floors. It was clearly just left and the people that ran the temple or worked there just left and walked away. What happened? We don't know.

Again, there are no inscriptions from this period. But it certainly gives rise to questions on whether this has anything to do with early biblical events. The babbling of Babel is an anthropological crux.

Anthropologists will make all sorts of claims about how to explain the rise of humanity and the origin of humanity apart from God. One thing they cannot explain is language, how human babies can start speaking at a very early age, how languages developed, and how they, more importantly, originated. Of course, Genesis 11, the Tower of Babel, gives the biblical explanation for that God confused the languages, and people began speaking different languages.

But anthropologists, again, cannot explain an alternative to that. Before we get on to other later eras and topics in archaeology, the Tower of Babel account is really entertaining, and it's kind of a polemic against the constant belief of humanity's attempt to somehow reach heaven and divine status. And, again, it's been in human history since the beginning.

The location of Babylon, Babel, means gate of God. Bab in Semitic is gate, El, God. And so they're building this ziggurat or this tower, and they work and work and work, and the Tower of Babel becomes Balaal or Babel confusion. So, there's a play on words there.

And you've got these people building this huge tower way up into the heavens, and God looks down, he says, what's going on down there? Way down there, what do I see? Again, it's entertaining, almost for laughs, making fun of, you know, humanity's efforts to try to reach the heavens. And so, he goes down and confuses their language. I pointed out here, too, that later kings like Nebuchadnezzar would build ziggurats and build towers and stamps, and buildings and stamp his name and cuneiform on every brick.

When some of these were restored by Saddam Hussein in the 1980s, the bricks that he used to restore them had Saddam Hussein's name written on them. Again, I'm kind of trying to be a neo-Nebuchadnezzar. What did the Tower of Babel look like? Probably like one of these ziggurats, a step pyramid.

And, of course, these would have had a temple at the top when it was in poor condition. The final thing I want to point out on the primeval history front is the Sumerian king lists. These were found in southern Mesopotamia.

Sumer was a very early Mesopotamian culture, and they had several tablets with lists of kings. And these kings had lists of kings that dated before and after what they called the Flood. And the lifespans of these kings were incredibly long, thousands of years.

And this reminds us again of the Toledoth, the genealogies in Genesis, where we also have lengthy lifespans, hundreds of years, not thousands of years. But there may be some, again, connection with that that could be hyperbole, certainly on the part of the Sumerian king lists. But what was going on? And maybe there's a connection there.

Now, it's interesting, too, that lifespans after the Fall continue to decrease. And by the time of Abraham, you have people still living long lives, but nothing like these early genealogy lists, specifically Genesis 5. So that wraps up our kind of examples from the early chapters in Genesis, and then we'll continue on to later periods.

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